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Prologue

The hospital room was silent—too silent—as the doctors and nurses worked together with quiet urgency. A nurse compressed the tiny newborn’s chest, up and down, up and down while Dr. Ruth Bruce held a small mask tightly over the little nose and mouth. “One, two, three. One, two, three,” she counted, squeezing the manual air pump in rhythm to the nurse’s compressions. After several tense minutes she asked the nurse, “Do you have a heart rate?”

The nurse hesitated. Then she shook her head.

Again the team worked to resuscitate our tiny baby girl lying in the incubator. She did not utter a cry or make any effort to breathe.

My husband Marvin glanced at my pale frightened face. “Let’s pray, Lorene,” he said softly, taking my hand in his. Together we bowed our heads and silently interceded for our baby’s life.

In respect for our privacy, Dr. Noll, the anesthesiologist, had waited outside the doorway until our baby was born. Now he stepped in to assist the nurses. In one smooth motion, he guided a breathing tube down the baby’s throat. He also administered epinephrine to get the tiny heart beating. Then the team wheeled the baby’s incubator toward the nursery, still working.

Dr. Bruce came back to stand beside my bed. Marvin and I watched her expectantly. “Do you think she’ll make it?” we asked.

“I can’t tell you anything yet, because I just don’t know,” Dr. Bruce said. Though her eyes showed her weariness, she moved around the room, finishing tasks the nurses had left undone. She did not tell us that, from a medical perspective, the chance that our baby would have severe brain damage was quite high—if she survived.

Dr. Bruce paused at my bedside before leaving the room. “Try to get a bit of rest, Lorene,” she admonished. “I’ll do my best to keep you updated.” Her footsteps faded down the hallway, and Marvin and I were alone.

But we were not truly alone in this dark hour. Jesus felt very near as we waited and prayed. We knew we would need strength to face whatever lay ahead.

1

Two Little Heartbeats

SUMMER 2015

I lay in the hospital exam room, watching the gray and white images on the screen. Suddenly I heard a gasp from the technician who was running the machine. She had found something—something good or something bad? When she met my gaze, the excitement in her eyes reassured me. Whatever it was, it must be good.

“I think you are carrying twins,” she said.

I stared at her. “Are you sure?” Marvin and I had known the high levels of my hormone counts could possibly mean twins, but to hear it confirmed was a surprise!

The tech nodded. “See?” She pointed to the screen where two little hearts beat side by side. “This is Baby A, and this is

Baby B.” We talked a bit more as she closed the computer and put things away. Her excitement bubbled over as she showed me to the door. “Oh, this is just so awesome, Lorene! I started my career only two months ago, and this is the first time I’ve discovered twins.”

As the technician talked, I felt my own excitement grow. My pregnancy was not a total secret. Marvin and I had already shared it with my parents, Vernon and Laura Ramer, and my two younger sisters, Joanna and Judith. Marvin had nine younger siblings and the youngest was five years old, so we had told only his parents, Carl and Marie Martin. But twins—that was big news! Maybe we could at least keep that

part a secret.

During the past few weeks, I had been thankful for fifteen-year-old Judith’s capable hands to take over the housework because of my extreme morning sickness. Our small daughters, Serena and Savannah, had spent lots of time on the couch or recliner with me, and I enjoyed reading stories to them.



Our home and farm in Michigan

TWO LITTLE HEARTBEATS

I could hardly wait to get home and tell Marvin the news. Today he was keeping an eye on our girls. Because we lived on a dairy farm, he was able to be at home much of the time. What a blessing!

My anticipation grew as the driver turned onto our dirt road. As members of the Old Order Mennonite Church, we usually traveled by horse and buggy when we visited friends and family in our community in central Michigan. For longer trips like this one, we hired a driver to take us in a vehicle.

We passed the row of trees bordering our fields, and our white farmhouse, the red dairy barns, the long rows of round bales, and the tall silo came into view. The driver pulled into our lane, which was lined with tall maple trees. I hurried up the walk to the back door, hoping Marvin would be in the house. He was.

As I entered the kitchen, he looked up from the table where he and the girls sat eating lunch. “How did your visit turn out?” he questioned.

“It’s twins!” I answered, delighted with the shocked look on his face. “And everything seems to be fine.”

Slowly he continued eating. “We must remember to thank the Lord and ask Him to keep His hand over you and the babies,” Marvin said. “You aren’t that far along, and things could still go wrong.”

He was right. We were only eight weeks into this. No one except God knew how it would turn out.

The weeks passed slowly as I continued to battle nausea, but the twins were fine. I was no longer able to help Marvin with barn chores, but Marvin’s siblings often traveled the half mile from their farm to ours and pitched in to help feed and milk our seventy cows.

Marvin took our girls with him when he could. They played with the feed in the barn or with the stones in the driveway. Simply putting stones into plastic bottles and dumping them out again could entertain them for a long time. Serena, age three, loved to ride her tricycle up and down the long aisle in our free-stall barn. Savannah, eighteen months, loved the animals, especially the calves.

The girls also spent happy hours in our backyard, playing on the swing set and in the sandbox. They enjoyed their pets, a kitten and a goat.

NOVEMBER 2015

At sixteen weeks, my doctor advised me to see a specialist. “Not that I think there’s anything wrong. It’s just our policy with twins,” Dr. Bruce assured me. I trusted her judgment, but once I had an appointment to go to Grand Rapids the following week, I couldn’t help but worry a little. I had only been to Grand Rapids once before.

The worry grew, until I remembered that if God sends us trials, then He also gives us grace to bear them. I only needed to ask Jesus, and He would help bear the burden of the unknown.

Four ladies from our church joined me for the ride to Grand Rapids, an hour and a half from home. They would shop while I faced my appointment. As the van neared the medical complex, our chatter quieted. What a maze of buildings, streets, and parking ramps! None of us were very familiar with this part of the city.

“We’ll be thinking of you. See you in several hours,” my friends told me as they dropped me off at the doctor’s office.

I struggled to keep up with the nurse as we walked down the long hallway. The ultrasound machine was in the very last

room. The nurse stopped to let me catch up. “Whoever designed this doctor’s office didn’t do a very good job,” she apologized. I silently agreed.

“Do you want to know what you’re having?” the technician asked after I was situated on the table. “At seventeen weeks we might be able to tell, depending on the position of the babies.”

“Sure,” I said. Marvin and I had already decided that knowing the gender of our twins would make shopping for clothes and choosing names easier.

The technician began pointing out different things on the screen. Finally, I asked, “Can you see if they’re boys or girls?”

“Baby B is a boy. The other I keep trying to see, but it’s turned the wrong way. But I’m concerned by what I see,” she said matter-of-factly. “Have you had any bleeding or problems with spotting?”

A dart of fear shot through me. “No, I haven’t.”

The tech looked surprised. “You have placenta previa—which means Baby A’s placenta is too low. But,” she added, “there’s a pretty good chance of it moving later. Even so, we’ll need to see you every four weeks.”

An hour later I was back in the van with my friends. I told them about the placenta previa, but I did not tell them that I was carrying twins, nor that one was a boy. We had not even shared that secret with our parents. But we had asked Marvin’s sister Karen to change her wedding date to May, rather than April, when I was due. Karen had balked—until I told her the reason. Philip and Karen changed their wedding date—and they never told a soul about the twins.

Four weeks later Marvin went with me to Grand Rapids. This time we could see Baby A. “It’s a girl,” the tech announced. We were thankful that the twins looked healthy, and that the placenta had moved slightly.

I had ordered baby supplies from a catalog-order company, and the little girls were excited when the UPS man brought a large box to our door one day.

“What’s in it, Mom?” Serena asked.

“I ordered some baby things,” I said.

“Let’s open it,” Serena begged.

“Open it,” Savannah echoed.

So we did. Out came pink and blue swaddling blankets, pink and blue bottles, and a brand-new baby scales.

Since I was restricted to doing only light housework, the cooking and cleaning and laundry were more than my sister Judith could do alone. We asked Abigail, another young girl, to help once or twice a week. I hoped that once the twins arrived, Abigail and Judith could take turns helping with the babies at night. I knew not to expect help from Marvin. He worked hard every day to provide for our needs, and he also slept solidly, even when our other babies had fussed at night. I didn’t expect that this time would be different.

It was hard to keep my spirits up when I needed to rest so much—I had so much time to think and worry. But Marvin often encouraged me to trust God more and worry less. Doing small projects helped. I sewed our dresses for Karen’s wedding and even helped Karen sew her own wedding dress.

On days when Judith and Abigail weren’t there, I sewed matching baby outfits and carefully hid my projects so that they wouldn’t start catching on. Most of the time keeping the secret was fun, but in a tight spot I had to be careful that I didn’t lie about my condition. The nurses and doctors knew we were keeping it a secret, and at every office visit they would ask, “Is the cat still in the bag?”